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CHRISTOPHER LASCH AND PRAIRIE POPULISM

JON K. LAUCK

Christopher Lasch was born in Omaha in 1932. By the end of his life, cut short at age sixty-one, he had become one of the most famous intellectuals in the world.¹ During his life of active writing from the time of the early Cold War until the fall of the Soviet Union, Lasch's distinctive voice pierced through the din of the nation's noisy political and cultural debates. The historian Jackson Lears recalled, in particular, the "spell that Lasch

cast over a generation of historians and cultural critics who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s."² A product and one-time devotee of the American Left, Lasch later solidified his standing as a commanding figure in American letters as a trenchant and at times brutal critic of American liberalism.

Throughout his life, both when he was firmly planted in the traditions of the Left and after his dissent began, Lasch embodied a prairie skepticism about the vision and drift of his fellow intellectuals, the allegedly liberating aspects of modern life, and the coercive inclinations of technocratic planners. His midwestern roots, Lasch said, were a "reference point to which I was always in one way or another returning."³ Lasch's work, with its multitude of insights, his later skepticism of the narrative constraints of recent historiography, his attentiveness to regionalist sensibilities, his concern about the erosion of historical knowledge and the health of democracy, and his general rediscovery of older cultural traditions in the American past, can provide much-needed perspective to historical interpretation. More specifically, Lasch's origins in, identification with, and understanding of the Midwest can help

Key Words: agrarianism, Cold War, Iowa, liberalism, Nebraska, Omaha

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rescue the region's history from irrelevance and give it broader meaning.

Lasch's most striking qualities were his intense honesty and his willingness to speak and write openly, despite the personal costs. In his recent biography of Lasch, which helps link Lasch to his prairie roots, Eric Miller cites Kathleen Norris, who won fame with her meditation on returning to the Dakota prairie, on the social role of prophetic voices such as Lasch: "A prophet's task is to reveal the fault lines hidden beneath the comfortable surface of the worlds we invent for ourselves, the national myths as well as the little lies and delusions of control and security that get us through the day."⁴ Lasch's pursuit of the truth, his fear of the "tremendous void" left by the decline of "historical awareness," his aversion to the suffocating fog of ideology, and his commitment to making democracy workable ultimately led him back to the prairie's most famous political movement, Populism.⁵

Lasch's explicit turn to the Populist movement and to broader forms of populism late in life helps explain his early works and elucidates his doubts about elite opinion and his resistance to the derisive treatment of the common man and traditional culture. His treatment of populism was not based on in-depth archival research or close attention to late nineteenth-century Populist institutions, platforms, or party activities, but was part of a more general search for relief from elite condescension, growing bureaucratic controls, and developments in the politics of the American Left that he thought threatened American democracy.⁶ This search included attention to historical precedent and belief in the proposition, as he wrote in 1980, "that the only way to understand the contemporary crisis is to understand it historically."⁷ Lasch's turn to populism was, most fundamentally, driven by his commitment to bolstering American democracy. Greatly inspired by the publication of Lawrence Goodwyn's history of Populism in 1976—which, Lasch thought, made "earlier work on [Populism] look like child's play"—Lasch helped draw attention to Populist history

as a method, as Goodwyn said, of determining "how democratic culture might be achieved."⁸

NEBRASKA ROOTS

Lasch's intellectual odyssey began on the Nebraska prairie, a biographical fact that contributed to his later interest in the history of Populism and his broader embrace of populist sentiments. Lasch's father, Robert, was born in a small house near 27th and N Streets in Lincoln in 1907, at the same time and in the same city that witnessed the creation of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and Robert's family bounced around the Midwest for several years, including stints in Chicago, Springfield, Illinois, and Kansas City.⁹ The Lasch family, Robert recalled, "had always been hard up."¹⁰ In 1924 Robert enrolled at the University of Nebraska in part because his father "always felt a sentimental attachment to the university at Lincoln, following its football team with pride."¹¹ He enrolled as a philosophy major, wrote for the college newspaper, the *Daily Nebraskan*, and became a reporter down on M Street for the *Lincoln Star*.¹² A budding writer, Robert paid homage to Willa Cather, who, he said, "had risen from the Nebraska plains to become a leader in American letters. If she could do it, why not we?"¹³ In 1928 Robert was selected as the University of Nebraska's lone Rhodes Scholar. After three years in England, Robert returned to Nebraska and became an editor at the *Omaha World-Herald*.¹⁴

Christopher Lasch's mother, Zora Schaupp, was born in Rockville, Nebraska, in 1896. Zora's father was a Lutheran schoolteacher from Indiana who had lost his faith, and her mother's family ran a successful cattle-ranching operation. After a short stint on the Southern Plains, Zora's family returned to Nebraska in 1904, and her father took a job managing a grain elevator in Virginia, Nebraska. He became active in politics and eventually won a seat, as a Democrat, in the state legislature in 1912. Zora enrolled at the University of Nebraska in 1916, and her feminism and politi-

cal engagement impressed some of her professors, who urged her to attend graduate school. After earning a master's degree from Nebraska, Zora earned a PhD in philosophy from Bryn Mawr and returned to the University of Nebraska to teach. Her roommate in Lincoln was Willa Cather's sister, Elsie, who taught high school in Lincoln.¹⁵

One of Zora's best students at Nebraska was the young Robert Lasch. When Zora studied in England during the 1929–30 academic year, she connected on several occasions with Robert, who was there on his Rhodes Scholarship. Before she returned to Nebraska, they were engaged. They married during the summer of 1931, and the following June Christopher was born at the Methodist Hospital in Omaha.¹⁶ Robert remembered that the “dates occasioned a good deal of finger counting among friends. An interval of nine months and ten days, plus the fact that we were separated throughout the summer prior to marriage, put us in the clear.”¹⁷ They lived in houses in North Omaha, on Davenport Street, west of downtown, and in the western subdivision of Rockbrook.¹⁸ Unable to have more children, the Lasches also adopted a baby girl from Kansas City.¹⁹

Lasch's parents did not embrace the conservative Republicanism that one might associate with contemporary Nebraska. Both Robert and Zora were hostile to religion, and Lasch remembered them as “militant secularists.”²⁰ They came of age along with a budding group of American intellectuals who were generally critical of American middle-class life, who saw religion as repressive, and who reviled capitalism. At the *Omaha World-Herald*, for which William Jennings Bryan had once served as editor, Robert embraced its “tradition of populist-radicalism.”²¹ Bryan gave his “Cross of Gold” speech while at the same time serving as a correspondent for the *World-Herald*.²² Robert covered farmers' protests in Nebraska and Iowa during the Great Depression and “applauded their courage, and advocated other forms of direct action to challenge the system which had brought the agricultural economy to such a low estate.”²³ Robert was soon promoted to

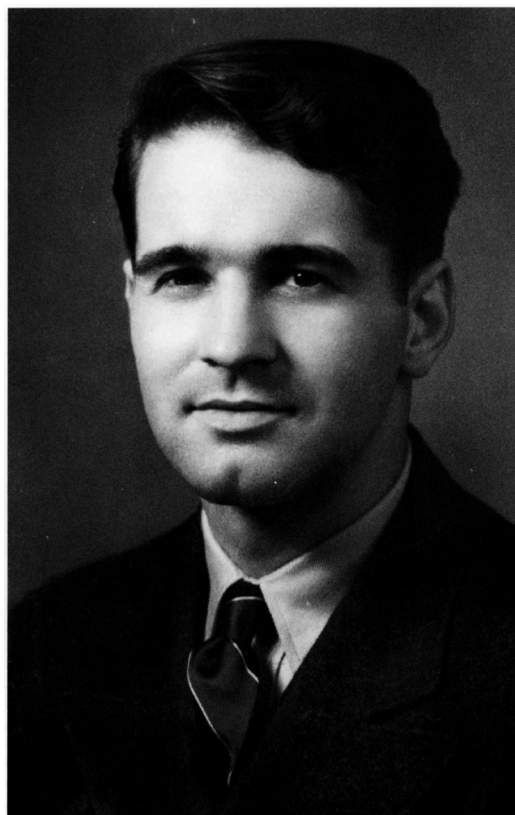


FIG. 1. Robert Lasch, father of Christopher Lasch, as a young reporter and editor for the *Omaha World-Herald* in a photo dated November 20, 1935. Courtesy of the *Omaha World-Herald*.

the position of editor for Nebraska and western Iowa news.²⁴ Robert supported the progressivism of Nebraska Senator George Norris and through his news reporting at the *World-Herald* “gave him as much favorable coverage as [he] could.”²⁵ He voted for the Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas in 1932 (Robert remembers taking Christopher to the polls that year because Christopher had fallen “out of bed on his head” and he feared “some deep trauma which never developed”), and Zora joined others on the Left by working for the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace in 1948.²⁶ During the sixties, Robert won a Pulitzer Prize for his columns criticizing the Vietnam War.²⁷ All the Lasches came to despise Nixon and Reagan.

EDUCATION, THE LEFT, AND IOWA

Lasch ultimately graduated from high school in Chicago because his father had “pulled up [the family’s] Nebraska roots” in order to accept an editorial position at the *Chicago Sun*.²⁸ The Lasches rented a house in the Republican suburbs of the North Shore and Christopher matriculated at Barrington High School, where the precocious young Lasch embraced art, music, and, above all, writing, and attacked what he then saw as the narrowness and provincialism of his peers.²⁹ Lasch said he was always “flaunting my atheism” and making “fun of their religiosity.”³⁰ At age sixteen, he trumpeted his support of the Iowa-born Henry Wallace and his Progressive Party presidential ticket in school assemblies. Lasch graduated in 1950 and left for Harvard, where he was surrounded by similarly brilliant students. He described to his parents the “insecurity” that is “often found in people who are from the Midwest but seem ashamed to admit it.”³¹ Although not a part of the Eastern elite, Lasch found many like-minded liberals at Harvard. As one professor recalled about these years, at Harvard there was a “mutual reassurance that everybody shared the same liberal beliefs about everything.”³²

Lasch’s original political path followed the course set by his parents, who remained anti-capitalist, irreligious, and staunchly supportive of liberal and radical causes. “I grew up in the tradition of Middle Western progressivism,” Lasch later recalled, “overlaid by the liberalism of the New Deal. I believed in the Tennessee Valley Authority, the CIO, and the United Nations.”³³ At Harvard, when the university president mentioned the possibility of chapel attendance, Lasch called him “a Midwestern puritan of the worst kind.”³⁴ Lasch remained an atheist at Harvard who opposed the “smug bigotry” and the “narrow-mindedness of organized religion.”³⁵ When he visited a friend’s family for Thanksgiving, he denounced them as “typical Indiana reactionaries.”³⁶ He saw Whittaker Chambers as a “degenerate.”³⁷ For the young Lasch, the United States in the

1950s, as he wrote to his girlfriend, was a country that “claims to be a democracy and yet has this hideous fascist monster in its insides.”³⁸

After Harvard, Lasch entered the graduate program in history at Columbia, where he was exposed to Richard Hofstadter, whose sweeping judgments on American history he would ultimately come to reject. In a sign of his interest in agrarian activism Lasch considered writing his dissertation about the Minnesota Populist Ignatius Donnelly, but ended up writing on liberals’ reaction to the Russian Revolution.³⁹ After a few short-term teaching stints and a research fellowship, Lasch joined the University of Iowa history department.⁴⁰ The Prairie Historian Allan Bogue, who was serving as departmental chairman at Iowa at the time (before his departure for Wisconsin), told Lasch that his credentials were impressive and that “a number of historians have suggested your name to us.”⁴¹ After a round of interviews, Bogue informed Lasch that he was the “outstanding man in our field of candidates.”⁴² In early January 1961, the Iowa history department voted to extend Lasch an offer to serve as a professor of recent American history, a field pioneered by the Prairie Historians of the Midwest.⁴³ Ten days later, Lasch accepted Iowa’s offer, and that spring he completed his doctoral work at Columbia.⁴⁴ At the University of Iowa Lasch occupied a messy office in Schaeffer Hall piled high with books, papers, and ashtrays and made light of Schaeffer Hall’s designation as a Cold War nuclear war shelter by the university’s Committee on Radioactive Fall-Out (he thought the drinking fountains were not up to the challenge).⁴⁵

Lasch generally found that Iowa City was a “wonderful place” and said that he was “terribly pleased with Iowa.” Eric Miller notes that “much to his surprise, Lasch discovered at Iowa a certain amount of interest, even support, for his increasingly radical views.”⁴⁶ He wrote to his parents that “we find ourselves more attached to Iowa City . . . than either of us suspected.”⁴⁷ That first spring, Christopher planted tomatoes and his wife planted trees at their new home. While Lasch enjoyed Iowa

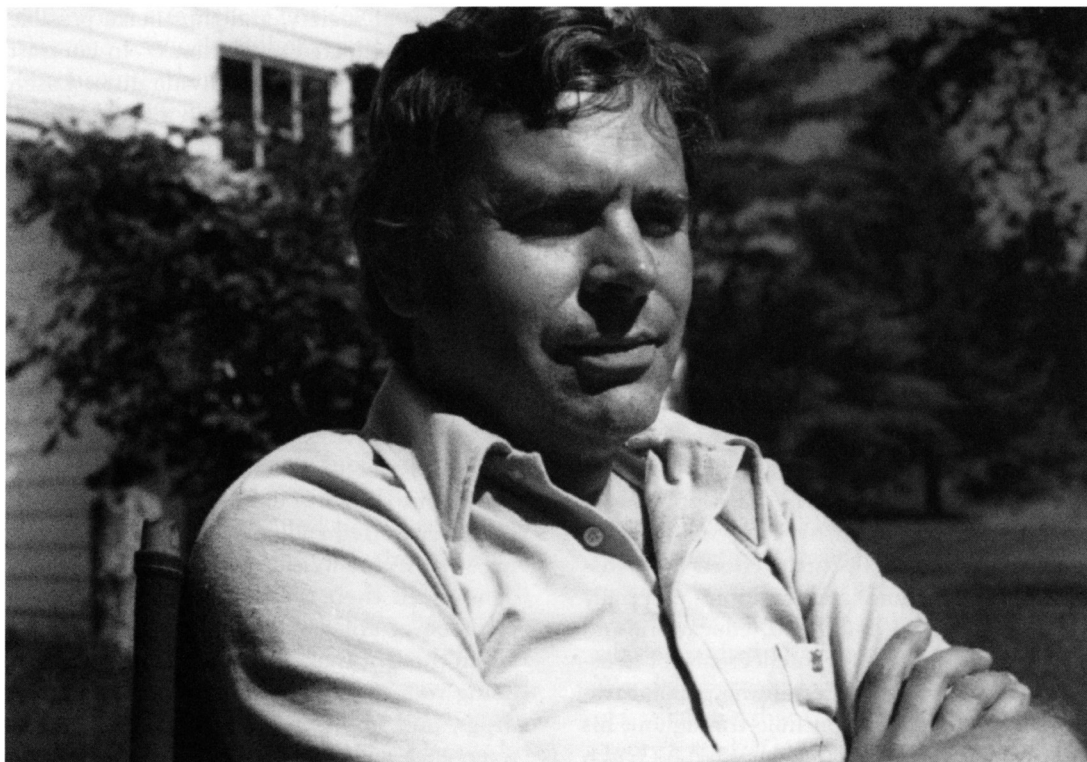


FIG. 2. Christopher Lasch as a young history professor, perhaps during his first major appointment at the University of Iowa (no date, no location available). Courtesy of Christopher Lasch Papers, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

City, he resented the fact that Ann Arbor and Madison received more attention for resisting the nation's Cold War foreign policy.⁴⁸ "[W]e thought we had staged the first teach-in," Lasch recalled.⁴⁹ John Wunder, a young Iowan who attended a Lasch teach-in at the University of Iowa student union, remembered him as a "compelling, brilliant lecturer" who "was kind of a 'cause' at that moment."⁵⁰ While at Iowa, Lasch was such an active writer that he literally wore out his typewriter.⁵¹

During his years at Columbia and Iowa, which roughly corresponded to the apex of the postwar liberal consensus, Lasch slowly became critical of the liberalism he had inherited from his parents. In his dissertation, which was published as a book by Columbia University Press in 1962, Lasch lamented the limited vision that encumbered liberals' response to the Russian Revolution and how the failure to accurately

comprehend events distorted the American reaction to the creation of the Soviet Union and helped precipitate the Cold War.⁵² Following on this study, Lasch soon went to work on a broader book about the growing prominence of liberal intellectuals during the first decades of the twentieth century. Soon after arriving in Iowa City, Lasch wrote to his Columbia advisor, William Leuchtenburg, and informed him of his plans for "a short book, a mere interpretative essay, on the American intellectual from 1900 to c. 1930."⁵³

The result was the publication, in 1965, of Lasch's book *The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, in which Lasch described the emergence of intellectuals as a "status group" in the United States.⁵⁴ Lasch argued that this new breed of social critic had failed at the essential task of closely analyzing and intelligently critiquing

the nation in a manner that would pave the way for social improvement. The intellectuals he examined suffered from limited perception, had forfeited the detachment necessary to accurately interpret events, and had replaced thought with “feeling” and “experience.”⁵⁵ Lasch also believed that the new intellectuals were too focused on promoting sexual freedom, and as Eric Miller explains, he criticized the “new radicals’ desire to make what he considered to be cultural matters the object of politics.”⁵⁶ Moreover, as Miller notes, these intellectuals sought social reform through the use of “strokes of coercive power,” which Lasch saw as “morally repugnant” and an “arrogant assault on fellow citizens.”⁵⁷ In a preview of themes that emerge in his later work, Lasch criticized these intellectuals’ efforts to transform American mores and traditions, especially as they related to childhood, education, and sex.⁵⁸ Lasch’s attacks on intellectuals for abusing their power and undermining popular traditions, which would continue throughout his life, always struck a populist chord.⁵⁹ As Lasch saw it, the “liberal myth of an enlightened tutelary elite” needed to “give way before evidence that allegedly backward, ‘nostalgic,’ and ‘petty bourgeois’ movements like populism actually had a much stronger commitment to democracy than more ‘progressive’ forces.”⁶⁰ Elites, Lasch later told the editor of the quarterly newsletter *The Populist*, needed to begin “firmly committing” themselves to “the ‘homespun’ values of middle-class America.”⁶¹

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Lasch increasingly blamed liberals for the spreading consumerism, deepening self-absorption, and rising individualism that undermined the possibility of substantive social reform. Lasch turned to the hard Left, the cultural Marxism of German émigrés, and English Marxism to understand American history, to explain why the Left could not advance its cause, and to rethink the “whole progressive tradition itself.”⁶² In his search for “a humane and democratic socialism,” Miller explains, Lasch conducted a “highly analytic search for ways to alter both the economic and psychic

conditions of society, and thus make possible the long-anticipated revolution.”⁶³ In contrast to liberals and radical individualists, Lasch thought that the “Marxists in the West took the long view and preached patience: the gradual preparation of a new culture.”⁶⁴

LEAVING THE LEFT

Lasch’s stinging critiques of American life and his skillful application of Leftist thought won him many radical allies, but he was uneasy with the tactics of the Left. The absurd behavior of student radicals and the general “lunacy of the New Left,” Lasch thought, would only undermine the effort to transform the nation.⁶⁵ Lasch criticized radical activists for cavorting with Communists in North Vietnam and denounced their uncritical and unthinking embrace of any radical tradition or cause.⁶⁶ Lasch thought that “hedonism, self-expression, doing your own thing, dancing in the streets, drugs, and sex [were] a formula for political impotence and a new despotism” and that the student radicals had “traded self-government for self-expression.”⁶⁷ The history profession, Lasch said, had also failed by embracing the “revolutionary mystique” and “such absurdities as ‘street history,’ ‘guerilla history,’ etc., [and] the whole notion of ‘radical history’ itself, of scholarship enlisted in the service of the revolution.”⁶⁸ Lasch denounced the politicized history of academics such as Howard Zinn for promoting the view that the “historian should write only the kind of history that will further radical causes, prepare the ground for the revolution, etc.”⁶⁹ While still at Iowa, Lasch began criticizing the Left’s “fashionable cult of ‘alienation’” and its “symbolic gestures of withdrawal and rejection,” the decision of “prominent beatniks and civil-rights activists” to “play symbolic parts, to pretend to be poor people or to pretend to be Negroes,” and the general rejection of the “Western tradition of rational discourse” in favor of the “obscurantist jargon of ‘the movement.’”⁷⁰ Upon returning to Iowa City for a visit after he had joined the history department at Northwestern, Lasch thought

the “whole atmosphere had changed” and had “become very ugly, full of recriminations, full of conspiracy theories of the wildest kind.” The once “sensible people” he knew at Iowa had embraced the “conspiratorial view of history.”⁷¹ The era of Benjamin Shambaugh and Louis Pelzer at Iowa and the Prairie Historian tradition of embracing and studying midwestern history had long since passed.⁷²

Lasch argued that the Left needed to persuade people that its program of reform was necessary, to support Leftist political candidates, to organize, and to generally build popular support for their goals instead of engaging in embarrassing and futile political theater. To that end, Lasch worked to organize socialist organizations and hoped that some day “a socialism appropriate to the American conditions” would emerge.⁷³ In 1968 Lasch said he wanted a “revolution,” but he realistically confessed, “I don’t see any possibility of a revolution in this country right now.”⁷⁴ All the radical energy of the 1960s, Lasch thought, had been wasted. If he had at times blunted his criticism of the student radicals—the socialist James Weinstein asked Lasch to refrain from “all public criticism of the nihilists”—in the ensuing years he would abandon his reticence.⁷⁵

In great frustration, Lasch turned away from sixties radicalism and from political activism.⁷⁶ He joined the history department at the University of Rochester to be part of what he hoped would be a cooperative intellectual effort to seriously examine American history and to realistically promote social reform.⁷⁷ He began to focus his study on the form of culture that would make social change possible, to draw upon the lessons, as Eric Miller explains, of “his parents’ early-twentieth-century Midwestern world,” and to weigh the consequences of self-absorption, consumerism, and family decay.⁷⁸ In Iowa City, Lasch had started to worry about his children’s social development and his Nebraska mother had begun to worry about her grandchildren’s proclivity toward consumption and their interest in “buying things.”⁷⁹ Those who studied the family, Lasch thought, did not take seri-

ously the erosion of family life. When auditing a class on the family at the University of Iowa in 1962, Lasch noted that scholars of the family “are simply propagandists for a more permissive attitude toward sex” and were treating sexual liberation as “a kind of panacea.”⁸⁰ Instead of embracing a culture that undermined families, Lasch sought a culture that respected “order and authority,” which were essential to implementing any kind of lasting social reform.⁸¹

POPULISM

During these years, Lasch began his explicit turn toward forms of populism. He drew upon his midwestern heritage in his search for groups who had resisted the changes in American culture and had doubted the march of progress and he turned to the Populist movement, regionalists, agrarians, naturalists, and authors who embodied all these movements, such as Wendell Berry.⁸² Lasch made clear that the old argument that Communism and socialism “represented a big improvement over ‘petty bourgeois’ movements like Populism and the Knights of Labor can no longer be sustained.”⁸³ Lasch became more sympathetic to the conservative opponents of cultural radicalism and embraced what he called the “generalized, ill-defined revolution against ‘permissiveness.’”⁸⁴ Lasch denounced what he called the “currently fashionable outcry against the repressive nuclear family.”⁸⁵ Lasch began defending the American social mores that cultural radicals had been attempting to transform with the “wholehearted cooperation of liberals.”⁸⁶ The liberal intellectuals of the early twentieth century and their radical descendents, Lasch thought, were directly contributing to the desiccation of family life and local culture. Lasch said the efforts of liberal elites to “deparochialize people” resulted in a nation of people “with no roots.”⁸⁷ Because of the role of progressive intellectuals and liberals in this effort, Lasch said he “no longer felt comfortable with the traditions I’d inherited.”⁸⁸

This discomfort included his parents’ hostility to religion, a hostility shared by the

emergent class of intellectuals that Lasch studied early in his career. As early as his years as a Harvard undergraduate, Lasch began to wonder, only tentatively, if he had been too dismissive of religion. When Lasch showed this early sign of interest in the history of religion, his mother considered arranging psychiatric help for her wayward son and thought the dean's office should be monitoring such problems.⁸⁹ But Lasch thought that progressives, as Lewis Mumford argued, had been living off the "unearned increment of religion" for too long.⁹⁰ He began to recognize the "presence of persistent spiritual needs that cannot be fulfilled by a secular culture."⁹¹ By the 1980s Lasch had more fully considered the Christian tradition and began to see hope in "a more deeply rooted, local way of life, one that invariably had been bound up in and constituted by religious structures, beliefs, and practice."⁹² Leftist ideologies, in contrast to religion, had "never been able to strike deep popular roots."⁹³ Only religion, Lasch thought, supplied the "ethical solidarity" necessary for an "assault on injustice."⁹⁴ Lasch came to see the Puritan tradition, which he was first exposed to at Harvard, as "perhaps our strongest reservoir of moral idealism."⁹⁵ Of his interest in Calvinism, he quipped in a letter to Barbara Ehrenreich, "I kept it under wraps for years but it was bound to come out in the end."⁹⁶

More generally, Lasch thought that the Western tradition, including Christianity, deserved to be understood and preserved, and as Eric Miller describes it, not pitched "onto the bonfire of cultural radicalism."⁹⁷ The history of the United States, its experiment in republican government, and its cultural and social traditions, deserved respect. Lasch protested against the erasure of American social and cultural history through the unthinking embrace of theories of "modernization," academic equivocation in the form of multiculturalism, and the practice of radical history that focused on American historical sins and ignored American accomplishments and the nation's cultural endowment. The teaching of the Western tradition in the United

States, he thought, should not be dismissed "as just another form of cultural hegemony or imperialism."⁹⁸ Lasch thought a "kind of deculturation" had set in motion a "process of unlearning without historical precedent."⁹⁹ Lasch endorsed what Wilfred McClay deemed "neotraditionalism," or what Miller calls a "longing among Americans to restore their rapidly eroding connections to their past."¹⁰⁰ Lasch began to actively resist the modern "eagerness to proclaim the death of the past and to deny history's hold over the present."¹⁰¹ He called the "ever-present sense of historical discontinuity" the "blight of our society," which was losing the "sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future."¹⁰²

Lasch focused on roots. He emphasized the "particularities of place and time" in American historical development and saw workable democracy linked to "kinship ties, local and regional traditions, and attachments to the soil," which were undermined by the "deracinated, disoriented outlook that is so often confused, nowadays, with intellectual liberation."¹⁰³ He echoed Simone Weil's call for rootedness and embraced what he called Lewis Mumford's "critique of the 'metropolitan mind' with its educated contempt for roots."¹⁰⁴ Lasch called the Left's persistent attacks on social and cultural traditions a "misguided attempt to emancipate the individual from his past, from family ties, from the sense of place, and from nature itself" and denounced the promotion of lives "conceived as endless novelty, change, and excitement, as the titillation of the senses by every available stimulant."¹⁰⁵ Historians had also uncritically endorsed Richard Hofstadter's increasingly popular view of American history as a battle, Eric Miller explains, "between the unthinking, outmoded, village-loving, old-stock Americans and the cerebral, analytical, tolerant, city-dwelling pluralists."¹⁰⁶ Lasch thought that the forces of rural rootedness that Hofstadter had discounted, including the "allegedly reactionary sentiments like a strong attachment to the land and to individual ownership," had "played a much more democratic

and 'progressive' role in history than is assumed by intellectuals."¹⁰⁷

Lasch's attempt to recover the threads of the American past—what he called the “submerged traditions in American life”—that Hofstadter and other liberal historians had denigrated was set forth in his magnum opus, *The True and Only Heaven*, in which his own prairie roots were evident.¹⁰⁸ After discussing the artisans and intellectuals who questioned industrial capitalism, Lasch focused on the late nineteenth-century Populist movement. Although not fully articulated until *The True and Only Heaven*, Lasch's populist sentiments and his familial links to Populism began to emerge early in his work. Eric Miller notes Lasch's “personal ties” to Populism, including his maternal grandfather's job in Nebraska as a cooperative grain elevator manager and his campaign for the state legislature during which he embraced Populist themes, and explains how these “political sensibilities certainly molded [Lasch's] own family's political ideals.”¹⁰⁹ One of Lasch's graduate students concluded that the “basis of [Lasch's] morality . . . was just the populist movement in America.”¹¹⁰ M. J. Heale, noting early signs of Lasch's populist proclivities, said Lasch's “fellow Harvard graduates might be forgiven for suspecting that the young Nebraskan brought some prairie values with him when he came east.”¹¹¹

Lasch saw the Populists as devoted to small-scale farming and to protecting the tradition of decentralized production through the use of farmer-run cooperatives.¹¹² Underlying these efforts was a commitment to the independent yeoman farmer and the artisan tradition of nineteenth-century America and doubts about the industrial “progress” that Tugwell and other technocratic planners would push farmers to embrace. The self-organization of the Populists into farmers' buying and selling cooperatives contrasted sharply with extremist state intervention in socialist economies such as the Soviet Union, where “forcible collectivization,” Lasch wrote, had resulted in “vast human devastation.”¹¹³ Unlike many on the Left who saw large-scale production as

“consistent with democracy,” Lasch thought societies “dominated by large-scale production [were] more and more hierarchical, inequalitarian and undemocratic.”¹¹⁴ Lasch subscribed to the view that the Populists and the cooperative movement were ultimately corrupted by a turn to currency issues and fusion with the Democrats.¹¹⁵ Lasch believed that historians, too willing to follow Richard Hofstadter, had missed the early Populist vision and too readily saw Populism as backward and nostalgic and only as a precursor to the milder reforms of elite-led Progressivism. Such an interpretation, Lasch thought, would only “consign the Populists to the garbage dump of history.”¹¹⁶ Lasch sought, Eric Miller explains, to reverse the “smug and narrow conceptions of populism that Hofstadter and other intellectuals had in the twentieth century done so much to plant.”¹¹⁷ Instead of seeing the family farm heritage as “outmoded” and “hopelessly reactionary,” Lasch saw great promise in the agrarian impulse in favor of “small-scale production and grass-roots political control.”¹¹⁸

Lasch's conception of Populism in *The True and Only Heaven* relied heavily on the work of historians such as Lawrence Goodwyn and Steven Hahn.¹¹⁹ In 1980, when asked by the *New York Times* to recommend books for “summer reading,” Lasch listed Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*, which he said “explores one of the last genuinely democratic movements in American politics, Populism, and clarifies the far-reaching consequences of its defeat.”¹²⁰ Lasch said that Goodwyn, who he saw as “a kind of lone survivor from the almost extinguished tradition of Southern populism,” “had the effrontery to find something of value in Populism, which Marxists and liberals alike have always regarded with a mixture of contempt and horror.”¹²¹ Lasch was particularly active in creating platforms for Goodwyn's work and in assisting Goodwyn's efforts to find funding for further research.¹²² Lasch strongly supported Goodwyn's application for a MacArthur Fellowship based on *Democratic Promise* and “Goodwyn's massive demonstration of the deeply radical character

of the late-nineteenth-century agrarian movement."¹²³ By focusing on the Populists and their rooted, democratic character, Lasch agreed with Goodwyn that the two scholars were "lifting the blanket of modern sophistication" and allowing the "human race a better chance to breathe."¹²⁴ Lasch was transcending the era of Hofstadter-inspired farmer-bashing and returning to the findings of the Prairie Historians, who first took the Populists seriously as a democratic force in American life.¹²⁵ He was in the process of recovering a major component of the midwestern historical tradition.

Lasch was also persuaded by the evidence of anticapitalist resistance among Southern farmers in Steven Hahn's *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890*.¹²⁶ Hahn's book bore a heavy Lasch imprint, as it started as a senior honor's thesis directed by Lasch at Rochester.¹²⁷ Lasch even suggested changing the title to *The Georgia Yeomanry* and focusing the study on "a particular class and its way of life" instead of solely focusing on its relation to Populism.¹²⁸ Similar to his attraction to Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*, Lasch was drawn to Hahn's efforts to preserve the memory of a class of people who had used local culture and republican principles to resist modernization, industrialism, and capitalist development.¹²⁹ Lasch also appreciated Hahn's recognition of the "premodern" aspects of Southern culture chronicled by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, although he agreed with Hahn that the treatment was "very muddled."¹³⁰

Lasch's attraction to populism before his embrace of the work of Goodwyn and Hahn, as well as evidence of his old Nebraska roots at work, could also be detected more than two decades before *The True and Only Heaven*. In *The Agony of the American Left*, Lasch briefly explored the exhaustion of the Populist and socialist movements in the early years of the twentieth century. In his treatment, Lasch emphasized that the Populists, in contrast to the socialists, were much more aligned with American traditions, less ideological, and more resistant to centralized bureaucracy and stat-

ism. The Populist vision, unlike socialism, did not require a long reeducation campaign nor a "fundamental restructuring of American society," because it was firmly linked to American historical precedent.¹³¹ The Populists were not Marxists. Their views were grounded in the "democracy of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln."¹³² Populism persisted in various forms, including the "LaFollette wing of the progressive movement," the brand of politics Lasch's parents held dear and which included a strong strand of midwestern agrarianism and favored political and economic decentralization over statist central planning.¹³³ It was the populist version of midwestern progressivism to which Lasch returned in the decades after *The Agony of the American Left*.¹³⁴ By returning to this populism, Lasch was returning to his Nebraska roots. He had lessened his early intellectual focus on the theories of Marx and Freud—and his parents' hostility to religion, a very un-Populist attribute—and returned to the midwestern populist tradition.

Lasch's attempt to revitalize the tradition of American populism, and his promotion of older American political and cultural traditions in general, faced stiff opposition. For many years, Hofstadter and other historians had ridiculed the popular revival of interest in the American past as a "nostalgic" taste for "Americana."¹³⁵ "By the early sixties," Lasch wrote, "denunciation of nostalgia had become a ritual, performed, like all rituals, with a minimum of critical reflection."¹³⁶ Lasch thought that the liberal intellectuals and cultural radicals who sought to dismiss the public appetite for history were foolishly casting away a wealth of traditions and precedents, including populism, which could revive American democracy. The attack on nostalgia, coupled with earlier depictions of a post-World War I "lost generation" and the emergence of the tendency to think in generational categories, led to "a shortening of historical attention, an inability to recall events beyond a single lifetime" and to the loss of the "connecting thread between earlier times and our own."¹³⁷ Lasch, as M. J. Heale explains, instead saw a "passionate

commitment to history as a means of understanding the present and perhaps improving the future.”¹³⁸ Lasch placed particular hope in Americans who were products of farms and small towns because they tended to “carry the weight of a personal and collective history.”¹³⁹ These Americans, Lasch thought, lived day to day with historical consequences and were less susceptible to fads, “creating new identities,” and an “eclectic approach to history, appropriating whatever we need in order to piece together a ‘usable past.’”¹⁴⁰ Lasch fought the attempt to construct or manipulate a “past” for ideological purposes and sought one grounded in custom and tradition.¹⁴¹

Lasch’s devotion to preserving fading elements of the American past spurred his successful effort to rescue the Populists from years of derision at the hands of Richard Hofstadter.¹⁴² The triumph of Lasch, along with a number of lower-profile critics, over Hofstadter is given added texture and detail by David Brown in his exceptional biography of Hofstadter. Brown’s treatment of Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform*, in which Hofstadter sets forth his critique of Populism, lends credence to Lasch’s suspicions of Hofstadter’s interpretation. Brown explains that Hofstadter’s dedication to urban cosmopolitanism and presentist fears of McCarthyism strongly colored his treatment of Populism. Brown notes how “Hofstadter’s tendency to overemphasize his insights left him vulnerable” and that, after serious doubts had been raised about his interpretation of Populism, “Hofstadter distanced himself from *The Age of Reform*’s most provocative claims.”¹⁴³ Hofstadter admitted privately to Merle Curti, a native Nebraskan, that he had intentionally exaggerated Populist anti-Semitism for effect.¹⁴⁴ Lasch’s celebration of Populism in *The True and Only Heaven* served as a coda to this long-running debate. Lasch’s book *The Revolt of the Elites*, published just after his death, delivered another blow to Hofstadter’s cosmopolitanism and, in a final allusion to Nebraska populism, denounced American elites for “turning their back on the heartland.”¹⁴⁵ In *Revolt*, Lasch pointed once

again to the “agrarian uprising” of the late nineteenth century as the “first round in a long, losing struggle to save the family farm” and, more generally, as a sign of the erosion of the nation’s republican and civic traditions.¹⁴⁶

Lasch’s and Hofstadter’s diverging visions of American history can tell us much about the role of the personal—in Lasch’s case, the role of the prairie—in historical interpretation. Lasch worked as Hofstadter’s research assistant at Columbia in the 1950s and they breathed the same intellectual air, shared the same generally liberal sensibilities, and disdained the politics of the Cold War. While Lasch thoroughly respected Hofstadter’s brilliance and his willingness to make bold and broad historical judgments, Lasch was not as taken with the supposed expertise of social scientists, as Hofstadter was, nor did he love New York City, which Hofstadter did. Their respective backgrounds in Nebraska and New York were unmistakable. Lasch saw a great tradition of civic-mindedness and republicanism on the prairie. Hofstadter doubted that the agrarian “golden age” defended by the Populists ever existed, but regardless of its existence, thought that “to live in that world, actually to enjoy its cherished promise and its imagined innocence, is no longer within our power.”¹⁴⁷ In *The True and Only Heaven*, Lasch criticized H. L. Mencken and other critics of the midwestern small town and prairie life and came to “see Hofstadter as a latter-day version of H. L. Mencken, endlessly belaboring the ‘booboisie.’”¹⁴⁸ In his later writings, Lasch was pointed about Hofstadter, but even as early as Lasch’s first year at the University of Iowa, Allan Bogue could detect Lasch’s aversion to Hofstadter’s treatment of the Populists and noted, as he wrote to Lasch, the young historian’s “deep sense of obligation to steep yourself in a Populist gestalt before you definitively refute Hofstadter.”¹⁴⁹

Although they viewed Populism and rural life differently, Lasch and Hofstadter also shared an important judgment. They were both disgusted by the New Left, appalled by its attacks on the university, and fearful of its

effects on democracy.¹⁵⁰ The centrist liberalism that Hofstadter embodied was literally besieged by student radicals at Columbia, and he criticized their embrace of violence, the guerilla theater performed for the benefit of television cameras, their purposeful baiting of the police as “pigs,” and their mindless attacks on the “system.”¹⁵¹ His student Robert Dalleck recalled that Hofstadter “was deeply disturbed by the irrationality of the Left.”¹⁵² In 1970 Hofstadter said that if he got “around to writing a general history of the recent past, I’m going to call the chapter on the ’60s ‘The Age of Rubbish.’”¹⁵³ Hofstadter died soon after this remark, but perhaps he would have joined Lasch’s mid-1970s turn toward a growing respect for the traditions and mores of lower middle-class Americans and tempered his assault on Populism.¹⁵⁴ Alfred Kazin detected evidence of this potential turn, remembering Hofstadter as “a secret conservative in a radical period.”¹⁵⁵

Along with finding some significance in Populism that Hofstadter, before his death, never did, perhaps Lasch’s most powerful legacy—one shared at least partially with the late Hofstadter—is his searching and painful critique of the American Left. Lasch’s strong credentials as a Leftist and supporter of socialism and his deep knowledge of radical theory made him an incisive critic of the Left with strong bona fides. Few others would have been listened to as closely as Lasch. Although it pained him to criticize his allies, and he was stung by the returning fire, his commitment to speaking truthfully was unwavering. And, Lasch thought, some members of the younger generation were eager to listen. Lasch sensed that students had become weary of the dogma of the cultural Left and that they wanted “to hear some plain words of truth” and be exposed to some “moral wisdom and intellectual guidance about the things that matter.”¹⁵⁶

The hard truth, Lasch thought, was that the Left, in which he had put so much faith and to which he had dedicated so much energy, had led the nation astray. He thought the Left’s commitment to uprooting American traditions ultimately threatened the workability

of American democracy. The Left failed to understand the consequences of rootlessness and growing statism and was “impervious, as usual, to the sobering influence of events.”¹⁵⁷ The “left’s quarrel with America,” as Lasch called it, was based on its view of America as trapped in “backward, provincial habits.”¹⁵⁸ The Left was especially appalled at the “vast hinterland beyond the Alleghenies—the land of the Yahoo, the John Birch Society, and the Ku Klux Klan” and continually feared “being overwhelmed by America’s backward culture.”¹⁵⁹ The postwar decades “seemed to confirm liberals in the belief that the ordinary American had never been a liberal and was unlikely to become one.”¹⁶⁰

Lasch lost hope in liberal intellectuals’ ability to engage in rigorous and analytical inquiries that could enlighten and renew the nation. He condemned “vaporous theorizing” and concluded that “there really isn’t much room on the left for the kind of questioning that is really serious.”¹⁶¹ Lasch thought that liberals were “single-mindedly obsessed with racism and ideological fanaticism” and that they consistently challenged the motives of those who dissented from this obsession.¹⁶² The academy was overtaken by “political correctness,” he thought, and the process of serious debate had broken down, even in his department at Rochester, in which he once saw great promise: “There is a permanent sense of grievance; the whole institution is built on the politics of envy. It’s a poisonous atmosphere, ruinous to any serious pursuit of learning.”¹⁶³ Lasch said the “worst people of all are in the humanities, which have been overtaken by refugees of the New Left who are opposed on principle to any form of structure, coherence, authority, or intellectual rigor—all these things being part of the cultural imperialism long visited on the world by dead white European males.”¹⁶⁴ Lasch saw the obsession with “race, class, and gender” as “a mess!”¹⁶⁵

Despite the resistance from academic colleagues, Lasch’s arguments persuaded some younger scholars who found even more evidence of the influences of the cultural and social

traditions that Lasch emphasized. Lasch's PhD students at Iowa included Donald Kirschner, William Powers, Glenn Smith, John Hopper, and Thomas Ryan, who all explored rural themes relating to the state's treatment of traditional rural communities.¹⁶⁶ At Rochester, Lasch oversaw the work of Charles Shindo, who sought to transcend the clichés about the Okie migration to California and to map the belief systems of rural migrants, or what he called "plain folk Americanism."¹⁶⁷ Shindo explained how liberal "reformers and artists excluded the migrants' own voice from being heard," purposely suppressed their embrace of religion and tradition, and "obscured the traditional and populist elements of Okie culture in favor of a liberal and progressive interpretation of the migrants' aspirations."¹⁶⁸ Lasch similarly noted that progressives' attacks on religion were linked to "rural reaction" and fears of a revival of religion and explained how liberals "have done their best to stamp [religion] out." He praised Shindo for his ability to transcend "dogmatism, conformity, distrust of truly original works, [and] craven submission to the party line."¹⁶⁹ Lasch's concern over the assault on the family, the church, the common culture, and the nation's cultural tradition of "reticence and propriety" can also be found in the work of his student Rochelle Gurstein, who worked extensively with Lasch on her seminal research that explored these themes.¹⁷⁰ Lasch's intense interest in the culture of the *petite bourgeoisie* and the civic energy of small towns can also be found in Catherine McNicol Stock's impressive history of the "old middle class" in the Dakotas, where the ownership of land and businesses was widespread, which fit with Lasch's populist sympathies.¹⁷¹

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the supportive findings of younger scholars, Lasch's vision, although powerful and searching, was not unobstructed. In his focus on the luminaries of the Left, Lasch missed or failed to engage some of the solid academic works produced by those who were less taken by the intellectual turn of the 1960s.

Several historians working in the 1950s and 1960s had already questioned the wisdom of Hofstadter's interpretation of American history. Lasch's critique could be so unyielding because he did not always account for those who also dissented from the main currents of thought on the intellectual Left. Lasch's scathing tone is what caused his critic, Louis Menand, to comment that Lasch's writing had an "invasion-of-the-body snatchers urgency."¹⁷² Lasch's account of Populism, too, was based on a narrow reading of the movement—despite the existence of a vast, complex, and contradictory historiography of Populism—and did not include farmers who sought to work within the market system.¹⁷³ Lasch's criticism of capitalism was indiscriminate and failed to account for Populist-era farmers who were willingly market-oriented, for the Populist embrace of certain forms of modernity and progress, and more generally, for how capitalism could foster culture.¹⁷⁴ Lasch's writing could also be abstract and hard to understand, involve many fine and difficult distinctions, and rely on the grouping of ideas and people whose unifying characteristics were less than obvious. Even Lasch's embrace of populism, which he saw as the basis of the cultural and social reforms he envisioned, suffered from vagueness.¹⁷⁵

For all his promotion of roots, Lasch was not overly concerned with his own. He did not dwell on the arrival of the German Lasches in the Midwest, nor on the story of German settlement in Nebraska, which Frederick Luebke studied so thoroughly.¹⁷⁶ Instead of focusing on the Southern Populism of Lawrence Goodwyn and Steven Hahn, Lasch could have more thoroughly considered the characteristics of Northern Populism set forth in John D. Hicks's treatment, *The Populist Revolt*, the first synthetic treatment of Populism, which dominated the field for decades, and a book Hicks wrote while a professor at the University of Nebraska.¹⁷⁷ More generally, Lasch would have benefitted from a greater awareness of the Populist historiography first launched by the Prairie Historian Solon Buck and, in particular, from more recent works on Populism which

focused on its grounding in rural republicanism.¹⁷⁸ Lasch never said much about his fellow Nebraskan William Jennings Bryan either, despite Bryan's representation of the "agrarian wing of the progressive movement whose roots were deeply embedded in Populism."¹⁷⁹ Lasch would abandon his parents' intellectual, technocratic, and cosmopolitan progressivism in favor of Bryan's rural, religious, and moralistic populism, but he did not directly connect this transition to his own Nebraska roots.

While Lasch's cutting judgments were incisive and his social diagnoses exacting, an immersion in his writing can risk incapacitation. The centrifugal forces of social disintegration whirl so fast in Lasch's work that his conception of chastened hope can at times seem pointless. Although Lasch never relented, he understood the potentially paralyzing results of extreme pronouncements, the risk that they could immobilize the public and deepen social inertia, and the danger of "the endless announcement of decadence" and the embrace of a "tone of unrelieved gloom."¹⁸⁰ Lasch's dire warnings were surely heartfelt, but one wishes at times for more evidence to validate the doctrine of hope that Lasch set forth and for Lasch to recognize that more remnants of the old republican and religious traditions had survived than he intimated. At the moment of despair, however, when the reader's mind approaches a saturation point about the difficulties ahead, Lasch offers a hopeful insight. The most despairing among us, Lasch told the graduating history majors at Rochester in 1993, are those who once suffered under the "big illusions" of ideology during the 1960s. The future, he wisely counseled, belonged to "a cold-eyed realism that is by no means incompatible with warm hearts."¹⁸¹ Lasch, it might be said, was urging a form of prairie realism as a vision for overcoming the savage ideological wars of the twentieth century and the wanton attacks on the nation's social and cultural foundations.

Regardless of its degree of intensity, the central thrust of Lasch's critique of modern liberalism spoke some essential truths at crucial times in American letters. Lasch's defense

of American traditions against the withering attacks of cultural radicals stands as a testament to his bravery, his deep understanding of the Western canon, his honesty and independence, and his commitment to the historical past. He embraced the various strands of populism as a model for reforming and renewing American culture because populism, both the political movement connected to Lasch's Nebraska heritage and its more general form, stood "for things most Americans still believe in and are willing to defend."¹⁸² Lasch's importance lies in his recognition of the fundamental qualities necessary for the survival of American democracy and the need to defend them, and in his attempts to repair the "devastated realm of the political."¹⁸³ As Eric Miller concludes in his elegant rendering of the force of Lasch's writing, "Democracy, like all good things, was a tenuous achievement, in need of vigilant, jealous defense."¹⁸⁴ Lasch's vigilance, rooted in prairie populism and regionalist sentiments, still lives on in the corpus of his work and in our democratic hopes.

NOTES

1. George Scialabba deemed Lasch the "most important American social critic in recent decades." "A Muse of Politics: A Prophet, Honored," *Harvard Review*, no. 8 (Spring 1995): 102. Richard Rorty called Lasch "one of the most influential scholars of American culture and society in the postwar era." Rorty, "Two Cheers for Elitism," *New Yorker*, January 30, 1995, 86.

2. Jackson Lears, "The Grim Optimism of Christopher Lasch," *New Republic*, October 2, 1995.

3. Casey Blake and Christopher Phelps, "History as Social Criticism: Conversations with Christopher Lasch," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 4 (March 1994): 1311.

4. Eric Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time: A Life of Christopher Lasch* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), xv, quoting Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 34. Norris's *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York, Mariner Books, 2001) first made her famous.

5. Lasch, "History in America," *Salmagundi*, no. 50–51 (Fall 1980–Winter 1981): 190.

6. For Lasch's general attention to the *petite bourgeois*, the worker, and agrarian resistance to modern progress, small "p" populism is used in this article. For references to the formal political move-

ment of farmers during the late nineteenth century, capital "P" Populism is used. Lasch understood that "populism" could be a "rather slippery term." Peggy Brawer and Sergio Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," *Telos* 97 (Fall 1993): 125.

7. Lasch to Leon Fink, July 7, 1980, Christopher Lasch Papers, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester (hereinafter Lasch Papers).

8. Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers; Lawrence Goodwyn to Lasch, May 18, 1981, "A Proposal to the Ford Foundation," p. 3, Lasch Papers; Lasch to Leon Fink, July 7, 1980, Lasch Papers; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). Lasch believed that *Democratic Promise* was "the best work on [Populism] to have appeared since [C. Vann] Woodward's *Tom Watson* (1938)." Lasch to Richard Sharpe, June 9, 1981, Lasch Papers. Sharpe oversaw grants at the Ford Foundation. Goodwyn believes that his "book turned Lasch toward Populism." Interview with Lawrence Goodwyn, April 20, 2012.

9. Robert Lasch, "What I Remember," 2, manuscript located in Lasch Papers. The manuscript is inscribed "for Christopher Oct. 1987." Jon Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," *Annals of Iowa* 71 (Spring 2012): 139.

10. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 4.

11. Lasch, "What I Remember," 34.

12. *Ibid.*, 39, 41.

13. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 5. Robert said he "always liked Miss Cather's story of a visit to Red Cloud, her home town, after she became famous. Finding an old friend buying her latest book at the drug store, Miss Cather offered to sign it for her. 'Thanks, Miss Willy,' said the farm lady, 'but I'm buying the book for a gift, and I don't want no writing in it.'" Lasch, "What I Remember," 47. Christopher noted Cather's admiration for the local and particular culture she saw at work among Nebraska Germans, Scandinavians, and Bohemians "in that great cosmopolitan country known as the middle West." Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1991), 421.

14. Lasch, "What I Remember," 71; John Taylor, "Pulitzer Winner Robert Lasch Dies at 91; Ex-W-H Reporter," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 10, 1998.

15. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 5–10.

16. "Zora Schaupp Weds Robert Lasch," *Lincoln Star*, September 3, 1931; Lasch, "What I Remember," 75; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 9–10.

17. Lasch, "What I Remember," 75.

18. Nebraska State Historical Society to author, August 6, 2010; Lasch, "What I Remember," 86–87.

19. Lasch, "What I Remember," 86.

20. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 17.

21. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 12. The *Omaha World-Herald* was the "leading Democratic daily in the state" of Nebraska and a "loyal friend of the Democratic Party." Bryan was only the second Democratic congressman in the history of Nebraska. Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 27–28, 41. David S. Brown has also connected Christopher Lasch to the tradition of midwestern populism in historical writing in *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 149–72. See also Jon Lauck, "The 'Interior Tradition' in American History," *Annals of Iowa* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 82–93.

22. Lasch, "What I Remember," 76.

23. *Ibid.*, 78.

24. *Ibid.*, 80.

25. Lasch, "What I Remember," 81; Richard Lowitt to author, April 18, 2012. Lowitt, in a speech delivered in Omaha, explained Norris's rural Nebraska roots. Lowitt concluded that Norris "was born in the country and maintained his home as well as his heart there for the rest of his life." Richard Lowitt, "George W. Norris: A Country Boy in an Urbanizing Nation," *Nebraska History* 52 (1971): 234.

26. Lasch, "What I Remember," 76; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 12, 15.

27. "Robert Lasch, 91, a Pulitzer Prize Winner," *New York Times*, April 11, 1998.

28. Lasch, "What I Remember," 94; "Newspaper Vital to Democracy, Editorial Writer Lasch Feels," *Lincoln Star*, May 2, 1953; "Ex-Star Staffer Is Editorial Editor on Post-Dispatch," *Lincoln Star*, October 18, 1957. The *Chicago Sun* was owned by Marshall Field, whose widow later asked Robert Lasch to write a biography of Field. Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, November 15, 1959, William Edward Leuchtenburg Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (hereinafter Leuchtenburg Papers). Robert Lasch later became the editorial page editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Lasch records, Staff Vertical File, University of Iowa Libraries.

29. Lasch, "What I Remember," 94.

30. Blake and Phelps, "History as Social Criticism," 1313.

31. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 21; Lasch to Barrington Moore, April 30, 1970, Lasch Papers.

32. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 23, quoting Roger Rosenblatt. On Lasch and the Harvard class

of 1954, see Lasch, "The Class of '54, Thirty-Five Years Later," *Salmagundi*, no. 84 (Fall 1989): 35–40.

33. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 25. After their first meeting, Robert Coles thought Lasch a "friendly, gracious yet relaxed and informal young man, even then struggling to connect his progressive politics to an intensely moral sensibility, nurtured in the middle class of the Midwest." "Remembering Christopher Lasch," *New Oxford Review*, September 1994.

34. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 18.

35. *Ibid.*, 30.

36. *Ibid.*, 23.

37. *Ibid.*, 24.

38. *Ibid.*, 35.

39. Ray Allen Billington attempted to dissuade Lasch from writing about Donnelly because his student, Martin Ridge, had been working on a Donnelly biography for many years. Billington to Lasch, March 13, 1956, Lasch Papers. Ridge said Billington "aroused my interest in agrarian politics." Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1962), vii. Lasch also inquired about the topic with Theodore Blegen at the University of Minnesota. Blegen to Lasch, March 13, 1956, Lasch Papers.

40. Lasch visited Iowa in January 1961 and "was pleased and impressed. It seems a decent sort of place and the department congenial." Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, January 30, 1961, Leuchtenburg Papers.

41. Allan Bogue to Lasch, December 9, 1960, Lasch Papers; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 64. When Lasch was hired, William Leuchtenburg noted that "Iowa has made the most substantial canvass of any university in the country this year." Leuchtenburg to Lasch, February 6, 1961, Leuchtenburg Papers. Bogue recently recalled that he "liked [Lasch] and tried to accommodate him more than normal" and that Lasch "was very considerate of others." Bogue to author, August 1 and August 30, 2010. When Bogue moved to Wisconsin, he tried to hire Lasch again. Allan Bogue to Lasch, October 22, 1965, Lasch Papers. Prairie Historian, Nebraska native, and Wisconsin Professor Merle Curti regretted Lasch's decision to remain at Iowa. Merle Curti to Lasch, November 3, 1965, Lasch Papers. On a potential move to Wisconsin, Lasch wondered if he "could really stand living quite that close to the new left." Lasch to William Appleman Williams, January 25, 1968, Lasch Papers.

42. Allan Bogue to Lasch, January 5, 1961, Lasch Papers.

43. Allan Bogue to Lasch, January 23, 1961 and Lasch to Bogue, January 30, 1961, Lasch Papers. The Iowa history department placed a strong emphasis upon democratic decision-making and recorded the

votes of major decisions in the departmental minutes. William O. Aydelotte to Allan Bogue, June 29, 1959, Aydelotte Papers, University of Iowa Libraries; Stow Persons, "History at Iowa: The Modern Era," 2–5, University of Iowa Libraries. Professor William Aydelotte moved to hire Lasch and the motion was seconded by Professor Alan Spitzer. Minutes of the Meeting of the Department of History, January 20, 1961, Records of the Department of History, University of Iowa Libraries. Spitzer recalled the "brilliant promise of [Lasch's] dissertation" and how the "radio broadcast of [Lasch's] lectures stimulated widespread admiration in the Iowa City community." Spitzer to author, May 4, 2012. Lasch's lectures were broadcast by WSUI. Stow Persons to Lasch, July 31, 1962, and Lasch to Allan Bogue, August 21, 1962, Lasch Papers. The focus on recent American history at Iowa had been started by Arthur Schlesinger Sr., who was originally from Ohio and who advocated that the department promote meetings of historians of Iowa and Iowa history teachers to "build a feeling of regional community." Persons, "History at Iowa," 9, 12. Lasch took the place of Samuel Hays, who became departmental chairman at the University of Pittsburgh. Allan Bogue to Lasch, December 9, 1960, Lasch Papers; Persons, "History at Iowa," 9.

44. Lasch to Aydelotte, January 30, 1961, Aydelotte Papers, University of Iowa Libraries; Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, January 23, 1961, Leuchtenburg Papers.

45. "A Voice of Dissent," *Iowa Alumni Review*, October 1965, 18; Lasch, letter to editor of undesignated newspaper (probably the *Daily Iowan*), "Some Disconcerting Views on SUI Fallout Shelters," Lasch records, Staff Vertical File, University of Iowa Libraries.

46. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 68, 82; Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, September 30, 1961, Leuchtenburg Papers.

47. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 137 (source of quote); Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, September 30, 1961, Leuchtenburg Papers.

48. Some of Lasch's critiques of the nation's Cold War policies which were written while at Iowa can be found in old issues of the *Iowa Defender*, including Lasch, "Arthur Schlesinger and 'Pragmatic Liberalism,' Part I: The Cult of the Hard Boiled," *Iowa Defender* (April 29, 1963), Lasch records, Staff Vertical File, University of Iowa Libraries. For a sample of Lasch's furious opposition to American foreign policy during the Cuban missile crisis, see the draft of his unsent letter to Iowa U.S. Senator Jack Miller. Lasch to Jack Miller, October 18, 1962, Lasch Papers (unsent).

49. "History as Social Criticism," 1321; Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 27; "A Voice of Dissent," 20; Carey McWilliams to Lasch, May 18, 1965,

Lasch Papers; Lasch to Carey McWilliams, October 12, 1965, Lasch Papers. For Lasch's teach-in materials, see Louis Menashe and Ronald Radosh, eds., *Teach-Ins U.S.A.: Reports, Opinions, Documents* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 306–9.

50. John Wunder to author, August 20, 2010.

51. Lasch to Lawrence Gelfand, October 16, 1966, Lasch Papers.

52. Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

53. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 65.

54. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as Social Type* (New York: Knopf, 1965); “Lasch Book Receives High Praise,” *Daily Iowan*, July 7, 1965.

55. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 92–93.

56. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 95 (source of quote); Fred Siegel, “The Agony of Christopher Lasch,” *Reviews in American History* 8, no. 3 (September 1980): 288.

57. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 95.

58. Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America*, xiv–xv.

59. One reviewer noted that Lasch “was born and now teaches in the Middle West,” had “not succumbed to any of the obvious forms of intellectualism now flourishing in the Eastern United States,” and that neither the “New Frontier nor the New Left appeal to him.” Ramsay Cook, review of *The New Radicalism in America*, *International Journal* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1965): 549.

60. Lasch to Richard Sharpe, June 9, 1981, Lasch Papers.

61. Lasch to David Cole, March, 22, 1992, Lasch Papers.

62. Lasch to Russell Jacoby, July 8, 1980, Lasch Papers.

63. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 132, 113.

64. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 29.

65. Lasch, “America Today: An Exchange,” *Partisan Review* 42, no. 3 (1975): 368; Lasch to E. P. Thompson, June 12, 1976, and E. P. Thompson to Lasch, August 15, 1976, Lasch Papers.

66. Christopher Lasch, “Journey to Hanoi,” *New York Times Book Review*, April 23, 1967.

67. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 151; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 319.

68. Lasch, “Whatever Happened to Socialism?” *New York Review*, September 12, 1968 (mystique quote); Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 156; Lasch letter, *New York Review*, November 11, 1965, 37.

69. Lasch to Mary Furner, December 2, 1980, Lasch Papers (source of quotation). Lasch also criticized Zinn and noted the “rise of demands

that historians cultivate an ‘activist outlook’ and that history be subordinated to the needs of the ‘movement’” in “On Richard Hofstadter,” *New York Review*, March 8, 1973, 12.

70. Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, July 17, 1965, Leuchtenburg Papers.

71. Blake and Phelps, “History as Social Criticism,” 1322 (source of quotations); “Lasch to Leave Here for Northwestern Job,” *Daily Iowan*, May 5, 1966; Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, February 12, 1966, Leuchtenburg Papers.

72. Lauck, “The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History,” 143–44.

73. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 145.

74. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 141; Lasch, “Democratic Vistas,” *New York Review*, September 30, 1965, 5.

75. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 146.

76. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 25.

77. Lasch was lured to Rochester by Eugene Genovese, but their relationship quickly became strained. As Lasch once said, Genovese “certainly makes things hard for his friends.” Lasch to Ron Radosh, February 2, 1970, Lasch Papers (source of quotation); Lasch to William Appleman Williams, April 30, 1970, Lasch Papers; Lasch to Jim Holloway, June 22, 1970, Holloway Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi (hereinafter Holloway Papers). See also Ronald Radosh, “An Interview with Eugene Genovese: The Rise of a Marxist Historian,” *Change* 10, no. 10 (1978): 31–35.

78. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 168.

79. *Ibid.*, 171.

80. *Ibid.*, 175.

81. Lasch, “Politics and Social Theory,” *Salmagundi*, no. 46 (Fall 1979): 199; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 178.

82. Lasch’s debts to Berry are noted in Lasch to Steven Hahn, October 13, 1980, Lasch Papers; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 188; Kenneth Anderson, “Heartless World Revisited: Christopher Lasch’s Parting Polemic Against the New Class,” *Good Society* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 37. On Berry, see also Allan C. Carlson, *The New Agrarian Mind: The Movement toward Decentralist Thought in 20th Century America* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 2000), 177–201; Kimberly K. Smith, *Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Tradition: A Common Grace* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Steven Hahn, “Agriculture and Political Culture,” *democracy* vol. 1, no. 4 (1981), 99–109; and Mark Bittman, “Wendell Berry, American Hero,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2012.

83. Lasch to Leon Fink, July 7, 1980, Lasch Papers.

84. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 190 (source of quotation); Lasch, “Politics and Social Theory: A Reply to the Critics,” *Salmagundi*, no. 46 (Fall 1979):

199. For Lasch's criticism of conservatives' defense of the market, see Lasch, "What's Wrong with the Right?" *Tikkun* 1, no. 1 (1987): 23–29. For a similar treatment, see Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, "Democracy Should Not Have Losers," *Minnesota Journal of Global Trade* 9 (Summer 2000): 589–93.

85. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 215; Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 34; Lasch, "The Cultural Civil War and the Crisis of Faith," *Katallagete* 8 (Summer 1982): 14. Lasch memorably wrote that the "cultural vanguard has become a rear guard. It attacks bastions long since surrendered: the patriarchal family, repressive sexual morality, the conventions of literary realism." Lasch, "Recovering Reality," *Salmagundi*, no. 42 (Summer–Fall 1978): 44. For his critique, Lasch said he was "regarded by feminists as public enemy no. 1" and also a "target of the rest of the left." Lasch to Jim Holloway, February 20, 1979, Holloway Papers.

86. Lasch, "Beyond Left and Right," review of *Why Americans Hate Politics* by E.J. Dionne, *Dissent*, Fall 1991, 588.

87. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 192, 191; Scialabba, "A Muse of Politics," 102; Steven Watts, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Critic: Christopher Lasch's Struggle with Progressive America," *American Studies* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 120; Lasch, "The Democratization of Culture: A Reappraisal," *Change* 7, no. 6 (Summer 1975): 20.

88. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 238.

89. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Lasch, "Lewis Mumford and the Myth of the Machine," *Salmagundi*, no. 49 (Summer 1980): 16; Lasch, "The Fragility of Liberalism," *Salmagundi*, no. 92 (Fall 1991): 10, 16; Lasch, "Liberalism and Civic Virtue," *Telos*, no. 88 (Summer 1991): 62. On Lasch's Mumford treatment, see Robert Boyers to Lasch, June 10, 1979, Lasch Papers.

92. Lasch to Jim Holloway, June 28, 1980, Holloway Papers. See Lasch, "Theology and Politics: Reflections on Ellul's *Living Faith*," *Katallagete* 9 (Fall/Winter 1984): 10–15.

93. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 192 (source of quote); Lasch, "The Illusion of Disillusionment," 19–22. But Lasch was quick to deem a "full-scale restoration of a Christian theology" as "intellectually untenable." Lasch to Robert Boyers, February 27, 1979, Lasch Papers. As late as 1982, Lasch confessed to "having hardly ever set foot in a church." Lasch to Jim Holloway, February 11, 1982, Holloway Papers.

94. Christopher Lasch, "Religious Contributions to Social Movements: Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel, and Its Critics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 8.

95. Lasch to Jim Holloway, August 22, 1980, Lasch Papers.

96. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 333, 289. Lasch's wife, according to one source, believed that he had become a Christian. Jeremy Beer, "On Christopher Lasch," *Modern Age* 47, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 342. Robert Westbrook, a close associate of Lasch at Rochester, denies this account. Westbrook to author, August 17, 2010.

97. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 232 (source of quotation); Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 125.

98. Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 127.

99. Lasch, "The Fragility of Liberalism," 7; Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 127; Lasch to Frances Fitzgerald, November 10, 1980, Lasch Papers.

100. Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 282; Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 254; Jon Lauck, "History Without History," *The Social Critic* vol. 3, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 14–18.

101. Lasch, "The Illusion of Disillusionment," *Harper's*, July 1991, 19–22.

102. Lasch, "The Narcissist Society," *New York Review*, September 30, 1976, 12.

103. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 255, 262. For an exploration of this theme, see Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

104. Lasch, "Lewis Mumford and the Myth of the Machine," 12; Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind* (New York: Putnam, 1952). Lasch also emphasized the erosion of "local and regional loyalties" in *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 5. See also Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 17. For a recent work echoing this theme, see R. R. Reno, "We Need Roots," *First Things*, November 24, 2008.

105. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 265 (misguided quote); Lasch, "What's Wrong with the Right?" 26 (concealed quote).

106. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 326; Jon Lauck, *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly: The Political Economy of Grain Belt Farming, 1953–1980* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 168–69.

107. Lasch to Richard Sharpe, June 9, 1981, Lasch Papers.

108. Lasch, "Liberalism and Civic Virtue," 59; Jon Lauck, "'The Silent Artillery of Time': Understanding Social Change in the Rural Midwest," *Great Plains Quarterly* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 245.

109. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 259. Lasch's father wrote to him to remind him that Zora's

father's cooperative grain elevator suffered because farmers would sell to the commercial elevator when it paid higher prices for grain. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 260n30. Lasch's father also noted that when the "price of corn, hogs and wheat" increased during the 1930s "farmers returned to their natural home of political conservatism." Lasch, "What I Remember," 78. Lasch also mentions farmer cooperatives in *The Revolt of the Elites*, 81–82.

110. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 303.

111. M. J. Heale, "The Revolting American Elites: Christopher Lasch and His Enemies," *Journal of American Studies* 31 (1997): 113.

112. Lasch saw farmer cooperatives as an "alternative to the welfare state" and as part of the Populists' support for "non-bureaucratic solutions." Lasch, "Liberalism and Civic Virtue," 67.

113. Lasch, "Lewis Mumford and the Myth of the Machine," 20n10. Lasch endorsed the view that the Populists "refused to acquiesce in the conventional wisdom that centralized production represents the wave of the future." Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers. See also Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 124–25. On the embrace of large-scale farming by technocratic planners, see Deborah Fitzgerald, "Accounting for Change: Farmers and the Modernizing State," in Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston, *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2001), 182, 212.

114. Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 129.

115. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 217–19.

116. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 220. Lasch saw Hofstadter as an "urbanite to the core" who "found in sentimental agrarianism a particularly flagrant example of the unreality of American political rhetoric." Lasch, "On Richard Hofstadter," *New York Review*, March 8, 1973, 8. See also Lawrence Goodwyn, "Rethinking 'Populism': Paradoxes of Historiography and Democracy," *Telos* vol. 87 (1991): 40–44.

117. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 350. Lasch thought that Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* "simply crumbled (at least in its treatment of Populism) in the face of [Lawrence] Goodwyn's massive demonstration of the deeply radical character of the late nineteenth-century agrarian movement." Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers.

118. Lasch, "Democracy and the 'Crisis of Confidence,'" *democracy* 1 (January 1981): 36.

119. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 218–21, 543–44.

120. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 247–48n15. Lasch said, "Once you've read Goodwyn, you can never accept Hofstadter's account of Populism." Blake and Phelps, "History as Social Criticism," 1319.

121. Lasch to Richard Sharpe, June 9, 1981, Lasch Papers (survivor quote); Lasch, "Consensus: An Academic Question?" *Journal of American History* 76, no. 2 (September 1989): 459.

122. Lasch supported Goodwyn's efforts to solicit funding from the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Lasch to Lawrence Goodwyn, December 23, 1990, Lasch Papers; Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers; Lasch to Lawrence Goodwyn, June 15, 1981, Lasch Papers; Lawrence Goodwyn to Lasch, May 31, 1981, Lasch Papers.

123. Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers.

124. Lasch agreed with Goodwyn's characterization in Lasch to Lawrence Goodwyn, September 3, 1980, Lasch Papers (first quote); Lawrence Goodwyn to Lasch, August 17, 1980, Lasch Papers (second quote). For a critique of Goodwyn, see Robert W. Cherny, "Lawrence Goodwyn and Nebraska Populism: A Review Essay," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1981): 181–94; William F. Holmes, "Populism: In Search of Context," *Agricultural History* 64, no. 4 (1990): 28–32, 54–56; James Turner, "Understanding the Populists," *Journal of American History* 67, no. 2 (September 1980): 356–57; Stanley B. Parsons, Karen Toombs Parsons, Walter Killilae, and Beverly Borgers, "The Role of Cooperatives in the Development of the Movement Culture of Populism," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March 1983): 866–85; William C. Pratt, "Historians and the Lost World of Kansas Radicalism," *Kansas History* 30 (Winter 2007–8): 275; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880–1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 245.

125. Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," 161–63.

126. Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 543–44. On the similar theses of Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise* and Hahn's *Roots*, see Martin Ridge, "Populism Redux: John D. Hicks and *The Populist Revolt*," *Reviews in American History* 13, no. 1 (March 1985): 150.

127. Steven Hahn to Lasch, September 26, 1983, Lasch Papers; Steven Hahn to Lasch, September 18, 1979, Lasch Papers; Hahn, *The Roots of Southern*

Populism, ix. Although Hahn's study began as a paper in Lasch's seminar at Rochester, it "was inspired first by the work of C. Vann Woodward, then by works of a whole variety of historians and social scientists interested in popular movements, then by labor historians like [E. P.] Thompson and [Eric] Hobsbawm, and then by social historians working on rural America who were challenging the place of capitalism in US history." Hahn to author, September 20, 2010; Hahn to Lasch, September 26, 1983, Lasch Papers; Hahn to Lasch, February 16, 1974, Lasch Papers. In graduate school at Yale, Hahn's first advisor was C. Vann Woodward, but his dissertation was completed under the supervision of Howard Lamar. On Lamar's use of Populist history, see Jon Lauck, "The Old Roots of the New West: Howard Lamar and the Intellectual Origins of *Dakota Territory*," *Western Historical Quarterly* 39 (Autumn 2008): 268–69.

128. Lasch to Steven Hahn, October 16, 1979, Lasch Papers. While teaching at the University of Iowa, Lasch also taught Southern history. Christopher Lasch Vertical File, University of Iowa Libraries; Lasch to William Leuchtenburg, June 9, 1963, Leuchtenburg Papers.

129. Ridge, "Populism Redux," 150. For criticism of Hahn, see Holmes, "Populism," 41–43; J. Morgan Kousser, review of *The Roots of Southern Populism* by Steven Hahn, *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984). The notion that Southern Populism was more "radical" than Plains or Midwestern Populism is discussed in Robert C. McMath, "C. Vann Woodward and the Burden of Southern Populism," *Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 4 (November 2001): 754–56.

130. Lasch to Steven Hahn, July 20, 1984, Lasch Papers; Steven Hahn, "Honor and Patriarchy in the Old South," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 145–53.

131. Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 7. For an early and short treatment of Populism, see Lasch, "The Decline of Dissent," *Katallagete* 1 (Winter 1966–67): 11–12. Lasch also discusses the "scholarly rehabilitation of populism" after Hofstadter's criticisms in *The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 162. See also Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, 83.

132. Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 6. Lasch criticized Norman Pollack's *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), which saw Populism as a form of socialism, for resting "almost entirely on verbal correspondences; it is arrived at by piecing together a series of quotations abstracted from their context and treated with equal weight, without

regard for speaker or occasion, so as to form a wholly synthetic system which is then attributed to the Populists themselves." Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 5–6n4. Earlier, Lasch had discussed some prominent works of Populist history and questioned the reactionary label applied to the Populists and wondered if "perhaps Populism was one of the last expressions of what once had been a flourishing provincial culture." Lasch, review of *The Populist Response to Industrial America* by Norman Pollack and *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* by T. K. Nugent, *Pacific Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (February 1964): 72. Lasch also criticizes Pollack's treatment of Populist anti-Semitism in a letter to the editor, *American Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (April 1963): 910–11.

133. Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 5; Lasch, "Herbert Croly's America," *New York Review*, July 1, 1965, 19. Although Wisconsin "was never Populist territory," according to John D. Hicks, "it would be hard to find another American of the period more thoroughly representative of Middle Western agrarianism" than Robert LaFollette. John D. Hicks, "The Legacy of Populism in the Western Middle West," *Agricultural History* 23, no. 4 (October 1949): 226.

134. In 1972 Lasch also noted the "preindustrial" resistance of peasants and artisans to modern progress and found "highly suggestive [Barrington] Moore's remark, in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, that revolutions are set in motion not by emerging classes but by classes over whom the wheel of progress is about to roll." Lasch, *The World of Nations*, 107.

135. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 114. See also Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia: Losing History in the Mists of Ideology," *Harper's*, November 1984, 65–70, and "The Illusion of Disillusionment," *Harper's*, July 1991, 19–22.

136. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 116; Brawer and Benvenuto, "An Interview with Christopher Lasch," 126.

137. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 109, 112. A more positive portrayal of small town and rural life which embraced the image of a "lost Eden" that could not be recovered similarly "diminishes the past," Lasch thought, and blinds us to "the influence of the past on the present." Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 118.

138. Heale, "The Revolting American Elites," 103.

139. Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," 70.

140. Ibid.

141. Lasch, "On Richard Hofstadter," *New York Review*, March 8, 1973, 7–13. Lasch grew frustrated with the "radical" history of Staughton Lynd because, as he wrote to Lynd, to "you the radical tradition is sacred and must not be analyzed, except

to murmur approvingly." Robert B. Westbrook, "Christopher Lasch, the New Radicalism, and the Vocation of Intellectuals," *Reviews in American History* 23, no. 1 (March 1995): 185 (quoting Lasch). For Lasch's criticism of Lynd's father's attacks on the small-town Midwest, see Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 425.

142. Lasch thought that Hofstadter's argument was that a "sentimental agrarian myth [had] distorted political thinking and [had] prevented Americans from coming to grips with the urban, industrial civilization their country was destined to produce." Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," 67. Goodwyn's book *Democratic Promise* "tried to sideline Hofstadter, which Lasch appreciated." Lawrence Goodwyn interview, April 20, 2012.

143. David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 117–18.

144. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 338.

145. Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, 6.

146. *Ibid.*, 96.

147. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 110.

148. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 416; Blake and Phelps, "History as Social Criticism," 1317. Robert Collins notes that "Hofstadter saw not simply the dangers of populist democracy but more especially the threat posed to his cherished cosmopolitanism by the reactionary village culture of an older America." Robert M. Collins, "The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism," *Journal of American History* 76, no. 1 (June 1989): 165. On Lasch's appreciation of the civic culture of small towns, see Lasch, "Preserving the Mild Life: Neighborhood Hangouts and the Social Spirit of the City," review of *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* by Ray Oldenberg, *Pittsburgh History* 74 (Summer 1991): 87–91.

149. Allan Bogue to Lasch, December 20 [probably 1962], Lasch Papers. While at the University of Iowa, Lasch was close to publishing a 3,000-word article about Populism in the *New York Times Magazine*, but the editor decided it was not focused enough on "American politics today." Harvey Shapiro to Lasch, June 24, 1965, and Harvey Shapiro to Lasch, November 24, 1965, Lasch Papers. The draft of this article on Populism is located in the Lasch Papers.

150. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 148; Lasch to Jim Holloway, July 21, 1968, Holloway Papers.

151. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 215–17; Robert Erwin, "The Critic of Progress," *Massachusetts Review* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 291; Siegel, "The Agony of Christopher Lasch," 287–88.

152. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 218.

153. *Ibid.*, 226.

154. On Hofstadter's alienation from the Left and Lasch's debt to him, see Lasch to Warren Susman, October 26, 1970, Lasch Papers.

155. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 218.

156. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 367.

157. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 319 (source of quotation); Lasch, "The Fragility of Liberalism," 9.

158. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 35.

159. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 37; Lasch, "Democratic Vistas," *New York Review*, September 30, 1965, 4.

160. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 37.

161. Lasch to Lawrence Goodwyn, December 23, 1990, Lasch Papers (vaporous quote); Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 302 (questioning quote).

162. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 345; Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, 90–91; Lasch to J. G. A. Pocock, August 19, 1993, Lasch Papers. Lasch did not think affirmative action should "be 'saved' in any form." Lasch to David Cole, March 22, 1992, Lasch Papers.

163. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 363; Lasch, "The Fragility of Liberalism," 17.

164. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 363.

165. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 363; Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, 182.

166. The Lasch-directed theses at Iowa include Kirschner, "Rural-Urban Tensions in the Politics of the Twenties"; Bowers, "The Country Life Movement"; Smith, "William L. Langer and American Isolationism"; Hopper, "Aspects of the Career of Harold L. Ickes"; Ryan, "New Deal Agricultural Administrators." Faculty Personnel Data Blank, Lasch records, Staff Vertical File, University of Iowa Libraries. For the books that emerged from these dissertations, see Kirschner, *City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970) and Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900–1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974). Glenn Smith taught for many years at the University of North Dakota.

167. Charles Shindo thanks Lasch for his dissertation direction in Shindo to Lasch, August 2, 1993, Lasch Papers. Shindo also thanks Lasch in his book for providing "much-needed stylistic scrutiny of my dissertation, in addition to his usual incisive observations and his well-timed words of encouragement." Charles J. Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), xii. Lasch agreed with Shindo that his dissertation would benefit from a chapter about Dorothea Lange before it was transformed into a book. Lasch to Shindo, November 4, 1993, Lasch Papers. See also Jon Lauck, "Dorothea

Lange and the Limits of the Liberal Narrative: A Review Essay," *Heritage of the Great Plains* 45, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 4–37.

168. Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination*, 7–10.

169. Lasch, "The Cultural Civil War and the Crisis of Faith," *Katallagete* 8 (Summer 1982): 16 (stamp quote); Lasch to Shindo, November 4, 1993, Lasch Papers (dogmatism quote).

170. Lasch, "The Fragility of Liberalism," 16. See acknowledgments in Gurstein, *The Repeal of Reticence: A History of America's Cultural and Legal Struggles Over Free Speech, Obscenity, Sexual Liberation, and Modern Art* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), and the extensive Lasch–Gurstein correspondence in the Lasch Papers.

171. While "workers" outnumbered "proprietors" by a margin of three to one in New York, for example, the opposite was true in the Dakotas. Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 42. Drawing on Lasch, Stock explains how this old order of decentralized ownership and middle-class hegemony has been "relegated to the scrap heap of politically incorrect historiography" (7). Lasch said that "Stock's book on the old middle class manages the unusual feat of treating with sympathy and respect the kind of people who usually serve merely as the target of sophisticated ridicule." See dust jacket of *Main Street in Crisis*. On the origins of this social order in South Dakota, see Jon Lauck, *Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1979–1889* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010). For a new treatment of Populism in South Dakota, see R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880–1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011); and Jon Lauck review, *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* vol. 62, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 77–78.

172. Louis Menand, "Christopher Lasch's Quarrel with Liberalism," in *The Liberal Persuasion: Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and the Challenge of the American Past*, ed. John Patrick Diggins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 239.

173. Michael F. Magliari, "Populist Historiography Post-Hicks: Current Needs and Future Directions," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 16. The starkly different findings of historians of Populism are related to political and presentist biases. Connie Lester argues that histories of Populism "speak to historians on so many levels" that "analyses of the movements tend to follow the lines of current problems or crises." "Populist Scholarship as a Survey of American Social Change," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 1 (Winter

2008): 11. Bruce Palmer noted that "historians of all stripes . . . can find just about anything they want in Populism." "American History's Hardy Perennial: Populism from the 1970s," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1978): 561. On the "unusually bitter historiographical controversy" touched off by Richard Hofstadter's interpretation of Populism and a review of the "debate that raged in the pages of major journals and in the meeting rooms and hallways at historians' conventions," see Collins, "The Originality Trap," 152. On the "wrath" and "acrimony" in the various debates over the meaning of Populism, see K. D. Bicha, "Some Observations on 'Ideology and Behavior': Legislative Politics and Western Populism," *Agricultural History* 58, no. 1 (January 1984): 59. On the "Hofstadter imbroglio" over Populism and the "fracas" that ensued, see Turner, "Understanding the Populists," 356. See also, Holmes, "Populism," 27; Ridge, "Populism Redux," 152; Worth Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," *Kansas History* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 54–69. Rochester PhD Leon Fink warned Lasch about the "nebulous quality" of "Goodwynesque populism" in Leon Fink to Lasch, August 1, 1980, Lasch Papers. Lasch noted the "deficiencies of the populist tradition" in Lasch to Fink, August 15, 1980, Lasch Papers. For a review of the wildly varying treatments of Populism, see Goodwyn, "A Proposal to the Ford Foundation," 4–8, appended to Goodwyn to Lasch, May 18, 1981, Lasch Papers. Goodwyn's approach to Populism was deeply rooted in his experience as an organizer during the "Southern freedom movement of the 1960s." Goodwyn rejects the term "civil rights movement" as a "white construction." Interview with Lawrence Goodwyn, April 20, 2012. After serving as an editor for the *Texas Observer*, executive director of the "Civil Rights Coalition," and a freelance writer, Goodwyn earned his PhD in history from the University of Texas in 1971. Goodwyn vita, appended to Lasch to Officers of the MacArthur Foundation, November 3, 1989, Lasch Papers.

174. On how the Populists embraced forms of modernity, see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Leon Fink emphasized this point to Lasch in Fink to Lasch, August 1, 1980, Lasch Papers. For a discussion of Postel's new treatment of Populism, see "The Populist Vision: A Roundtable Discussion," *Kansas History* 32 (Spring 2009): 18–45. On capitalism and culture, see Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

175. Leon Fink to Lasch, August 1, 1980, Lasch Papers; Steven Hahn to author, September 20, 2010.

176. Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880–1900* (Lincoln:

University of Nebraska Press, 1969), and *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Paul Gottfried noted Lasch's "rugged German ancestors who had settled in Nebraska as farmers." "Voices Against Progress: What I Learned from Genovese, Lasch, and Bradford," *Front Porch Republic*, August 11, 2009.

177. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931); John D. Hicks, *My Life with History: An Autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 139–40; Robert C. McMath, "Politics Matters: John D. Hicks and the History of Populism," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 2; Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," 161–63.

178. Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," 161–63; Worth

Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," *Kansas History* vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 54–69.

179. Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 364.

180. Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 17; Lasch to Veronica Geng, July 8, 1980, Lasch Papers.

181. Christopher Lasch, Commencement Address to the Department of History at the University of Rochester, Spring 1993, reprinted as "The Baby Boomers: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow," *New Oxford Review*, September 1993; Lasch, "Academic Pseudo-Radicalism: The Charade of 'Subversion,'" *Salmagundi*, no. 88–89 (Fall 1990–Winter 1991): 29.

182. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 371.

183. Lasch to David Marr, December 27, 1980, Lasch Papers.

184. Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time*, 369.